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## Reptile reput has no dispute

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Square One

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Well, alligator. Another fine fix you've gotten yourself into. Overplayed your hand again, didn't you?

Look at you. All trussed up on a suburban pool deck, duct tape around your snout, while some yahoo gator trapper gives media interviews. You, the official state reptile. Species of special concern, for God's sake.

Oh, please. Sarcasm? "Special concern" means what it means. We protect you from hunters and poachers. We don't want you to go extinct. There is some ecological niche you guys occupy out there in the swamp and we need you to keep being there, but it doesn't mean ...

Let me finish, alligator. It doesn't mean we want you showing up in people's swimming pools and eating their Yorkshire terriers. And, by the way, what do we say about Yorkshire terriers? One Yorkshire terrier is too many ... ?

Right. And a million Yorkshire terriers are not enough.

You and Gator Jim here are going to be on the 6 o'clock news tonight. And you know what that means? It's going to remind people we wouldn't have an alligator problem if we hadn't made you an endangered species in 1967. It lasted only three years, sure, but it touched off the whole save-the-alligator ethic. And before you knew it, the Florida alligator population went from practically nothing to about a million.

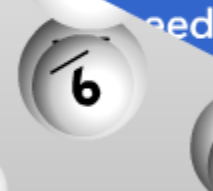
But now here you are, a flesh-and-blood, 12-foot carnivore, hunting pets in a subdivision. People are going to be, like, "What were we thinking? We need these things?"

You know what you need to do?

Alligator, I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that. What you need to do is get with the manatees. They're scarce, they're protected, people love them. And it's not that theoretical, don't-get-in-my-face kind of love, either. Manatees, my friend, do not have a body count. Alligators have killed 18 people since 1948 and there have been at least 200 unprovoked alligator attacks.

"Provoked" attacks? You mean, where the alligator was justified? I don't think they track that.

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The thing is, manatees are doing something right. They get a license plate. Whereas you get duct tape around your snout and, if I may tactlessly point it out, a nuisance alligator program.

I know. It's ironic as all get-out. Not enough alligators to relax the rules but enough to be a nuisance. Matter of fact, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is recruiting trappers right now on its Web site.

Requirements aren't rigorous. The biggest thing is, for whoever applies, it has to be at least five years since he poached an alligator. Kind of like car repossessing, I guess. They don't want to hire a practicing car thief, but ...

Exactly. They do want him to have the skills.

The pay's not bad. Gator Jim's going to get about a thousand bucks for picking you up today. No, not cash. Thing is, you are the pay, alligator. You and your constituent parts. The hide goes for 20 bucks a foot. You're about a hundred pounds of meat, I'd say, eight bucks a pound. Your head is worth probably \$300. What can I say? You're a Florida icon.

Well, looks like Gator Jim is wrapping it up with Eyewitness News over there. I'd better get going. Good luck with whatever, alligator.

Don't forget to tell them you're the state reptile.

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